

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A game and messenger client-server system, comprising:
2 a plurality of game clients;
3 a game server including logic to operate a multiplayer game using inputs from and
4 outputs to an active game set of game clients including the plurality of game
5 clients, wherein game clients other than those in the active game set can join an
6 active game by supplying the game server with a reference to the active game;
7 a plurality of messenger clients;
8 a messenger server including logic to forward messages from a sender messenger
9 client to a receiving messenger client;
10 logic to couple a game client to a messenger client to allow the game client to send
11 the messenger client data used to initiate joining a game, whereby a message
12 sent by the messenger client includes the data used to initiate joining a game;
13 and
14 logic to initiate a join of a game at an invitee client, using data received in a message
15 to the invitee.

1 2. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 1, wherein
2 the data used to initiate joining a game includes a reference to a game server, a reference
3 to an active game on the referenced game server, and commands usable to invoke a game
4 client at an invitee client and usable to connect the game client to the active game at the
5 game server.

1 3. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 2, wherein
2 the reference to the active game comprises a game identifier.

1 4. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 2, wherein
2 the commands usable to invoke the game client at the invitee client and usable to connect
3 the game client to the active game at the game server comprise a command line entry
4 usable to connect to the active game.

1 5. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 2, wherein
2 the commands usable to invoke the game client at the invitee client and usable to connect
3 the game client to the active game at the game server comprise a registry entry that
4 references a local reference to the game.

1 6. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 2, wherein
2 the commands usable to invoke the game client at the invitee client and usable to connect
3 the game client to the active game at the game server comprise a fallback entry that
4 references a remote location used to invoke the game.

1 7. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 6, wherein
2 the fallback entry is a URL.

1 8. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 1, further
2 comprising an icon that indicates a state of an inviter client.

1 9 The game and messenger client-server system of claim 8, wherein
2 the icon is a game-specific icon.

1 10. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 1, further
2 comprising logic to generate a data file sent in response to a request from the invitee
3 client.

1 11. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 10, wherein
2 the data file comprises a validity tag that indicates the game is valid and a command to
3 invoke the game client at the invitee client.

1 12. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 10, wherein
2 the data file comprises a fallback location that indicates a remote location that launches a
3 game client.

1 13. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 10, wherein
2 the data file comprises a support tag that indicates the game is not supported.

1 14. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 10, wherein
2 the data file comprises a tag that indicates the game is located in a valid remote location
3 and a location used to invoke the game client at the remote location.

1 15. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 14, wherein
2 remote location comprises a URL.

1 16. The game and messenger client-server system of claim 1, further
2 comprising a census process, the census process counting a number of times the game
3 client sends the messenger client data used to initiate joining a game.

1 17. A method of operating a multi-player game having a plurality of
2 game clients and a plurality of messenger clients, the plurality of game clients and
3 plurality of messenger clients in communication with a game server and a messenger
4 server, the method comprising:
5 joining the game by sending a reference to the game to the game server;
6 sending, from an inviter game client to an inviter messenger client, data
7 used to initiate joining the game;
8 sending a message including the data used to initiate joining the game to
9 the messenger server;
10 routing the message to an invitee messenger client; and
11 using the data in the routed message to invoke a game client and join the
12 game.

1 18. The method of claim 17, further comprising sending, from the
2 game server to the inviter game client, a reference used to join the game.

1 19. The method of claim 17, further comprising sending the message to
2 a list of messenger clients associated with the inviter messenger client,
3 wherein the updated state is perceptible by a user of the invitee messenger
4 client.

1 20. The method of claim 17, further comprising updating a state of an
2 icon associated with the inviter messenger client in response to receiving the message.

1 21. The method of claim 17, further comprising displaying a game-
2 specific icon identifying the game.

1 22. The method of claim 21, further comprising changing the game-
2 specific icon when the state of the inviter changes.

1 23. The method of claim 17, further comprising sending a request for a
2 game data file to the game server.

1 24. The method of claim 23, wherein the game data file includes a
2 reference to the game locally.

1 25. The method of claim 23, wherein the game data file includes a
2 reference indicating the game is not supported.

1 26. The method of claim 23, wherein the game data file includes a
2 reference used for loading the game from a remote location.

1 27. The method of claim 23, further comprising counting a number of
2 times a game client sends to a messenger client data used to initiate joining a game.

1 28. A method of operating a multi-player game having an inviter
2 client, an invitee client, and a server, the method comprising:
3 invoking an inviter game client at the inviter client;
4 connecting the inviter game client to the game by sending a reference to
5 the game to the server;
6 creating a message containing data used for invoking an invitee game
7 client and for joining the game;
8 routing the message to the invitee client; and
9 using the data in the message to invoke the invitee game client and join the
10 game.

1 29. The method of claim 28, wherein creating the message comprising
2 creating the message at the inviter client.

1 30. The method of claim 29, wherein routing the message is by using
2 TCP/IP.

1 31. The method of claim 28, wherein creating the message comprising
2 creating the message at the server.

1 32. The method of claim 31, further comprising sending the message to
2 a second server.

1 33. A game and messenger client-server system, comprising:
2 a plurality of game clients including an inviter and an invitee game client;

3 a plurality of messenger clients including an inviter and invitee messenger client;
4 a server including logic to operate a multiplayer game using inputs from and outputs
5 to an active game set of game clients of the plurality of game clients, wherein
6 game clients other than those in the active game set can join an active game by
7 supplying the server with a reference to the active game;
8 logic to couple the inviter game client to the inviter messenger client to allow the
9 inviter game client to send the inviter messenger client data used to initiate
10 joining a game, whereby a message sent by the inviter messenger client includes
11 the data used to initiate joining a game; and
12 logic to initiate a join of a game at the invitee game client, using data received in a
13 message to the invitee messenger client,
14 wherein the inviter messenger client includes logic to forward messages to the invitee
15 messenger client.

1 34. A game and messenger client-server system, comprising:
2 a plurality of game clients;
3 a game server including logic to operate a multiplayer game using inputs from and
4 outputs to an active game set of game clients of the plurality of game clients,
5 wherein game clients other than those in the active game set can join an active
6 game by supplying the game server with a reference to the active game;
7 a plurality of messenger clients;
8 a messenger server including logic to forward messages from a sender messenger
9 client to a receiving messenger client;
10 logic to couple the game server to the messenger server to allow the game server to
11 send the messenger server data used to initiate joining a game, whereby a
12 message sent by the messenger server includes the data used to initiate joining a
13 game; and
14 logic to initiate join of a game at an invitee client, using data received in a message to
15 the invitee.

1 35. A method for providing a multi-user networked computing
2 environment, the method using an activity server and a messenger server, where the
3 activity server and the messenger server are configured to communicate with a plurality
4 of user computer systems, the user computer system including an activity client where the

5 user computer system executes a user interface operated by a human user and is further
6 configured to engage an activity using the activity client, wherein the user interface
7 includes a display device and a user input device, wherein the user computer system is
8 coupled to a network for exchanging information with the activity server and the
9 messenger server, the method comprising:
10 accepting signals from the user input device to engage the activity using
11 the activity client;
12 presenting one or more preferences to the user computer system, where the
13 one or more preferences are associated with activities;
14 selecting at least one preference to join the activity;
15 invoking the selected activity with a messenger client;
16 providing to the messenger server a user state and a reference to the
17 activity in which the user is participating; and
18 presenting to another user associated with at least one of the plurality of
19 user computer systems the user state and the reference to the activity.

1 36. The method of claim 35 further comprising:
2 selecting to join the user in the activity by the another user;
3 invoking another activity client, where the another activity client is
4 associated with the another user; and
5 joining the user and the another user in a multi-user activity.

1 37. A method of claim 35, wherein the activity is a game.

1 38. A computer program designed to execute on a server having a
2 game server and a messenger server to provide a multi-player computer environment, the
3 computer program comprising:
4 program code to accept signals from the user input device to engage the
5 game using a game client;
6 program code to present one or more preferences to a user computer
7 system, where the one or more preferences are associated with games;
8 program code to select at least one preference to join the activity;
9 program code to invoke the selected game with a messenger client;
10 program code to provide to the messenger server a user state and a
11 reference to the game in which the user is playing; and

12 program code to present to another user associated with at least one of a
13 plurality of user computer systems the user state and the reference to the game.

1 39. The computer program of claim 38, further comprising:
2 program code to select to join the user in the game by the another user;
3 program code to invoke another game client, where the another game
4 client is associated with the another user; and
5 program code to join the user and the another user in a multi-game
6 activity.